

Indian Catholic teacher cleared of abuse charges

August 08, 2024

School in Sivagangai diocese allegedly implicated the mathematics teacher in a false case

A Catholic teacher has been acquitted in a case after the Church-run school management in southern [India](#) allegedly tried to frame him under a stringent law meant to protect children from sexual abuse.



The Madurai bench of Madras High Court in southern Tamil Nadu discharged Arokia Arul Thomas from the case, which accused him of inappropriately touching a female student in 2022.

Thomas' lawyer, Henri Tiphagne, said his client was trapped in a false case by a Catholic nun and a couple of priests of [Sivagangai diocese](#).

Thomas teaches mathematics at Sacred Heart Higher Secondary School in Thiruvarangam, a diocese-run school.

The state-run child welfare panel gave Thomas a clean chit, but “still the school management went ahead with the false case,” Tiphagne told UCA News on Aug. 8.

The court order was pronounced on July 9 but the copy was released on Aug 6.

Tiphagne said the alleged abuse victim, a grade 10 student at the school, confessed to the top court judge during an in-camera trial that the charges against the teacher were false.

Thomas was accused of touching her on the wrist and the head and was accused under the stringent Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

Without naming the girl, the judge noted what she told him in the order. “She was scribbling badly on her passport-size photo,” and Thomas inquired about it. She replied that “she does not like herself.”

She further stated that Thomas advised her not to have such an inferiority complex and gently touched her wrist and the head like a father figure “without any intention,” noted the order.

“When class teacher Sister Amutha [who goes by one name] asked her to sign a complaint, she signed without knowing the content,” the order said.

“We are not aware of the high court order,” said Father Christu Raj, education director of Sivagangai diocese. However, he added, “the diocese will comply with the order.”

Tiphagne also accused the diocese of transferring Thomas to the middle school from the high school.

Regarding Thomas’ demotion, the priest said the teacher was transferred as per “the requirement of the education department.”

He denied any management involvement in Thomas’ monthly salary, which has been pending for two years. As an aided school teacher, Thomas is on the government payroll.

The priest refused to divulge details of the alleged conspiracy against Thomas. “The matter is *sub judice*,” he said.

In his submission to the court, Thomas has named three priests and accused one of them of threatening him after he “highlighted alleged corruption in the school.”

“This is a self-defeating act,” said a Church leader who did not want to be named.

Church authorities are damaging their reputation while hardline Hindu groups in the country are out to attack Christians, he added.

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